

## **SATISFIES**

Mark 6:30-44

How many people are satisfied with their own life situation as compared to those who are satisfied with what is happening in our nation? About 80% report being satisfied with their own personal situation, while less than 20% are satisfied with what is happening in our nation. These figures do not address the level of their satisfaction. A separate survey puts that level around seven out of ten for most countries with South African showing a level just under five. There are many factors involved that influence “how many” and “how much” people say they are satisfied. A confounding issue is that most of us use the words “happiness” and “satisfaction” interchangeably. Happiness can be experienced when doing something pleasant, like eating chocolate or hanging out with friends. Satisfaction can be experienced when we look back at our lives and feel like we’ve accomplished something. Happiness is an emotion while satisfaction (or contentment) is based on reason.

My guess is that most people in the area of Israel during the early years of the first century were neither happy nor satisfied. They had problems such as poverty, lack of health care, and lack of freedom. Many were oppressed by the civil government of the Roman occupation, by the religious leaders of Judaism, by diseases and some experienced spiritual oppression. Into this situation, God came to them in the person of Jesus the Messiah and told them about a new kingdom and (by implication a new king). Kingdom benefits such as healing of diseases, deliverance from spiritual oppression, and an-unending supply of needs were demonstrated. The message was that God could satisfy all their needs in His Kingdom.

Jesus had sent out those whom He had named to be His Apostles to spread the word of this coming Kingdom and to provide physical evidence such as healing the sick, cleansing lepers and casting out demons.

### Rest – 6:30-32

<sup>30</sup> The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Mark 6:30–32 (ESV)

These verses confirm the success the disciple pairs had as they went to various villages and towns. Mark does not give the details of what they reported to Jesus when they came together. It’s likely that when they heard the reports from the other disciples that all of them were encouraged.

After having had such a mountaintop experience, it is good to have a time of reflection and put everything into a proper perspective. People can get themselves into physical and emotional overload conditions and Jesus was aware of this when He and they left for a secluded place to rest. When the word got out that people were being healed and delivered that prompted even more people to come looking for Jesus and His disciples. Again, we see a comment from Mark that it was so hectic that they did not have time to eat.

Maybe we could learn from their experience. When our ministry is actually helping people and they recognize that the source is from God, they will seek us out and be open to receiving God’s gifts of grace. We also need to realize that some will seek help from totally selfish motives and not be open to the message of the need for repentance. However, the opportunities to help people with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs may start with simply “planting a seed.”

### Response – 6:33-34

<sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. Mark 6:33–34 (ESV)

Sometimes solitude is difficult to find. Jesus had something that was worthwhile and people recognized it and wanted part of it because they lacked satisfaction in their lives. His popularity was perhaps a result of selfishness of the people who followed Him (for whatever benefit they might obtain such as healing) rather than them seeking after the Kingdom of God. But Jesus did not judge their motive when it came to having compassion for them. The disciples also cared for the people when they recognized that they would be needing food and a place to spend the night which they would not have in the remote area where they found Jesus.

### Resources – 6:35-38

<sup>35</sup> And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. <sup>36</sup> Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Mark 6:35–38 (ESV)

We’ve heard of having too much money at the end of the month. Our resources run out before all the needs are met. For a lot of people this is an ongoing experience. For others, the overwhelming need might be failing health or some dreaded disease. You could be overwhelmed with relationship problems or emotional issues or any number of addictions. It is overwhelming to think about all the possible really significant needs in the world.

What can we learn from this passage about Jesus feeding the five thousand that speaks to what we can do when faced with overwhelming needs? The first and most obvious lesson is our obvious inadequacy to deal with the gamut of needs we have as human beings. Assuming we realize that inadequacy, what do we do about it?

What was the initial reaction of the disciples to the need? “Send them away so they can go buy something to eat.” This is the “everyone feeds for himself” approach to the problems of life. Would that have worked in this situation? While it might be hard to imagine that a crowd this large would be able to find enough food in the villages and nearby towns, however, they would have been able to survive and return to their homes. This approach is pretty much like the frontier American ideal of being fiercely independent and “making do” with everyone taking care of his own needs. That is a workable approach to most problems we face but it is not adequate when the needs are truly overwhelming. In the “Little House on the Prairie” scenario, if the situation for one family became overwhelming, then the neighbors stepped in to help. What happens when the neighbors are all in the same situation of need?

What made this situation overwhelming? It actually started earlier in the day. Jesus and His disciples were attempting to get away for some rest and relaxation. However, many people had needs and others were curious and they showed up wherever He was. The easy thing would have been to have sent them away as soon as they arrived and then Jesus and the disciples could have gone about their intentions to have a retreat.

That did not happen. What prevented this from happening? A simple answer is the **compassion** that Jesus had for the crowd caused a change in their plans. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. He taught them and the time slipped away so that something needed to be done. It was still not too late to send them away; however, that was not done and now we see this extension of compassion had caused a crisis. *The crisis came about because human resources were not sufficient for compassion to really work with such a great need.*

I wonder if this is why we don't have more people involved in helping others? We look and see the need and know that those who are hurting need help. However, we conclude that it is too big for us to do anything with our limited resources to really make a difference. We might even go so far as to think that we couldn't really help if we used all our savings and everything in our checking account. This is what the disciples thought when they asked if they should go and spend eight-month wages on bread.

Notice a key difference in the emphasis of the disciples versus that of Jesus. The disciples were focused on what they did NOT have and Jesus directed them to look at what they did have.

#### Relief – 6:39-44

<sup>39</sup> Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. <sup>41</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. <sup>43</sup> And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

Mark 6:39-44 (ESV)

We could argue that what was happening is somewhat of the same message that Jesus had communicated in the parable of the mustard seed. Start with what you have (regardless of how small it is) and commit it to God and it will produce much. D. A. Carson observed: "In multiplying the loaves and fish God did in one moment of time what he does every day with the corn (grain) in the fields and the fish in the sea. To us, it is a miracle; to him, it is natural."

While this is a great comparison, we would be amiss if we did not acknowledge that there is a definite difference in fish in the sea and fried fish in a lunch box and there is a difference in grain growing in a field and grain that has been ground and baked into bread. The mustard seed, the live fish and the grain in the field have life in them and that miracle of reproduction is a result of the way they were created. The cooked fish and the bread had **no life** in them that would result in reproduction, yet in the hands of the Creator who is the giver of life, multiplication happened.

There are some obvious lessons here. When we are dead in trespasses and sins, then we are like the loaves and fish and we need new life in us to enable growth and to share this life with others. That new life is available **only** from the Creator of life and is what the **new birth** gives each person who has become part of the family of God. One might be tempted to ask the question, have we been "multiplied" since we presented our loaf and fish to the Master? If the answer is "No," then might we assume that the reason is because we haven't been broken? It was when the loaves were broken and when the fish were divided that the miracle happened.

What happens when compassion is limited to a humanistic world view or mind set? People may genuinely want to help others; however, because God is left out, they set out to do it in their own strength. It doesn't take long when dealing with material wealth and/or material resources that limitations are soon reached. If people or organizations reach their limits, they may seek outside help. For those who have rejected God, then the usual place to which they turn is the government. One of the problems with Humanism is that the proponents of this world view believe that man is his own god OR that the "state" is god. The Romans had this problem in that they blatantly claimed that Caesar was (a) god. The USSR was an example of the state setting itself up as god. If the state is to act as if it is god, then those in control might try to do what Jesus did in multiplying the loaves and fish. However, they do not have the power of God to actually create or to infuse life, therefore, the best that can be done is to produce what would

be the equivalent of photo copies of the loaves and fish. In actual practice, the government winds up just printing money to meet the overwhelming needs. Since there is no creative power for those who do not rely or trust in God, then the outcome is not sustainable.

Can you think of any present-day life examples of a successful outcome that resulted because a group that had compassion did not leave God out of the equation? Just recently, I received an email from Samaritan's Purse about their ministry during the past year. This is an example of someone with compassion who relied upon God and the results have touched millions of people.

This miracle Jesus did can also be interpreted to show us that He will provide the spiritual food needed for the purpose of feeding the spiritually hungry. We should look to him and not be eager to send people off to the "marketplace" of worldly philosophies for help but rather submit the little we have to Jesus and in His hands the meager means become much.

What about all the left overs or the scraps that were collected after the multitude had eaten. There was a basket for each of the disciples. One possible meaning is that when we are involved in meeting the needs of others in obedience to the Lord, then He will provide in an overabundant fashion for our own personal needs.

We learn from Mark's account of what happened later that night and the next day, that neither the people nor the disciples really grasped the significance of the miracle they had just witnessed. Sometimes things happen around us and, quite frankly, we are not sensitive enough to what is happening. Mark described this condition as it applied to the disciples as having their "hearts hardened" or simply "dull" in their understanding. We've all experienced this kind of dullness in that we might not realize what was happening until it was too late to properly respond.

Why is this miracle so important? First, we can see the compassion of Jesus for the hungry and for all who are in need. It also shows us the responsibility we have as followers of Jesus to have this same compassion and to do something about it ("you give them something to eat"). We should also see that however limited our resources, Christ can multiply them if we commit what we have to His service and that of others. (Richards, L. O. Bible Readers Companion)

Jesus looked at the situation, not as a problem, but as an opportunity to trust the Father and glorify His name. An effective leader is someone who sees potential in problems and is willing to act by faith. Acting on the basis of human wisdom, His disciples saw the problem but not the potential. How many times have God's people complained, "If we only had enough money, we could do something?" The first step is not to measure *our* resources, but to determine God's will and trust Him to meet the need.

John's account tells us that Jesus used this miracle as the basis for a sermon on "the bread of life." His miracles did meet human needs. Beyond that, each miracle was a revelation of Himself and it was a sermon or parable in action. For the most part, the people were amazed at the miracles, appreciated the help He gave them, but failed to get the spiritual message. They wanted the gift but not the Giver, the enjoyment (happiness) of physical blessings but not the enrichment (satisfaction) of spiritual blessings.

There is a lesson here for us as we attempt to meet the physical needs of people with Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets. We need to ask ourselves if the help we are giving is also a revelation of Who Jesus is.