

# A Compassionate Saviour & Hungry Gentiles

Mark 8:1-10

*Halifax: 1 December 2019*

## **Introduction**

This morning we will continue our sermon series from Mark.

- Today, we come to chapter 8.

In chapter 7, we saw that Jesus had gone into Gentile territory after being ill-treated by the Jews in Galilee.

- First, we saw that He was flooded with requests for healing, which was fine in itself, except that nobody seemed interested in what He was preaching: repent and believe, for the kingdom is at hand.
- Secondly, we saw that the leadership was looking to find fault with Him, even accusing Him and His disciples of eating with defiled hands because they did not follow the man-made traditions about ceremonially washing their hands.

So in 7:24, Jesus departed with His disciples for Phoenicia—a withdrawal from Galilee with His disciples.

- When He got there, He was encountered by a Syro-Phoenician woman who pled with Him to cast out a demon from her daughter.
  - He tested her by refusing her at first, and by telling her that it was not appropriate to give the children's bread (Israel's privileges) to the little dogs (the Gentiles like her).
  - But she responded by saying that even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table...
    - She saw that His mercy was so great toward His people that even a crumb that fell from the table would be plenty for her.
    - Her hope was not based on her own merit, but on the fact that He was so plenteous in mercy.
    - He was delighted with her answer and cast out the demon from her daughter.

We noted what a huge contrast this Gentile woman's attitude was to that of the Jews.

- She looked at Christ and she saw marvellous grace and mercy from Him to His people. She was delighted with Him!
- They looked at Him and were disappointed. They wondered why He did not go ahead and deliver them from the Romans. She admired Him; they criticised Him.

Last week we saw that Jesus remained in Gentile territory, making His way in a loop to the northeast around Galilee and then down to the south on the eastern side of the Decapolis—near the place He had once visited where He cast out a legion of demons.

- Once again, He had a request for mercy from the friends of deaf men with a major speech impediment who could not be understood.
- Jesus had compassion on the man, and soon there was a whole mass of people in this Gentile territory who came to Him, and, as Matthew tells us, He did many miracles of healing among them.
- Instead of disappointment and criticism such as He received from His own people, these Gentiles were deeply impressed and declared, "He has done all things well!"

This is where we pick up today—with Jesus still in the Gentile territory surrounded by the people of this area.

- Listen as I read to you from the text, Mark 8:1-10.
- This is the Word of God. Please listen now as I read it to you.

**Mark 8:1-13:** In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples *to Him* and said to them, <sup>2</sup> “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.” <sup>4</sup> Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” <sup>5</sup> He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” <sup>6</sup> So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples to set before *them*; and they set *them* before the multitude. <sup>7</sup> They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*. <sup>8</sup> So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. <sup>9</sup> Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, <sup>10</sup> immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy word.

There are two things I want to show from our text this morning.

- First, the beautiful zeal of these Gentiles.
- Second, the tender compassion of our Lord for these Gentiles.

Let’s get started.

## **I. See the beautiful zeal of these Gentiles.**

### **A. They have come out in great numbers.**

- Mark tells us that there are four thousand of them here.
  - This, of course, is not surprising when you have someone who can heal them.
  - This is similar to the kind of reaction He had in Galilee, but there are some striking differences:
- 1. First of all when the five thousand from Galilee gathered in a similar way to these four thousand in Decapolis, we know that they had an agenda for Jesus.
  - a. John tells us that the five thousand gathered because they wanted to force Jesus to be king.
    - We saw indication of that from the way that they were all men, and from the way that they ran to meet Jesus as He sailed across the lake.
    - They rounded each other up, it would seem, as a militia, probably made up of the Zealots who were very strong in Galilee.
      - Herod had recently executed John, they had seen Jesus’ miracles, and they were ready to raise up an insurrection to overthrow Rome.
  - b. There is no suggestion of a military purpose in these Gentiles at Decapolis.
    - Such a thing would never have even crossed their minds.
    - These are not freedom fighters looking for a leader—
      - They are admirers who have come to learn of Jesus, not to direct Him.

- c. This is a huge difference.
    - Do you come to Jesus as the Lord of glory and the God of all wisdom to sit at His feet and learn of Him, or do you come to direct Him about what He ought to do?
2. Second, though many came for healing no doubt, it is clear that that is not all that they were there for.
    - We can see this in the fact that they did not come and go, but remained with Him—that was why there were four thousand of them.
    - In Galilee, it seemed to have come about that people would bring their sick, see them healed, and then go on their way.
      - But Jesus comments that these folks in the Decapolis “have continued with Me for three days.”
        - The word *pros-me-ne-in* (translated *have continued*) connotes a special adherence and commitment to Jesus.
      - We have already seen how they admired Jesus and said that He had done all things well—
        - so in these people there is a devotion and a delight in Jesus Himself and His teaching—they want to stay with Him as long as they can.
    - A great lesson is here as well—do you come to Jesus with a list of needs, or do you come to admire Him and to be directed and blessed by Him in the ways that He wishes to bless you?
  3. Thirdly, there is no mention that any of these Gentiles have come out to find fault with Him or to demand a sign from Him.
    - a. They come because they are eager of learn of this one who has come to show mercy to His people and who has just now been showing mercy to them!
      - They are delighted with Him.
    - b. What about you? Be honest.
      - Are you like Israel in the wilderness, complaining about your lot in life, or do you come to place yourself at His disposal as the one who is merciful and does all things well?
      - Seriously... it is the difference between coming to a sovereign Saviour who is Lord of all, versus coming to a bumbling bureaucrat to tell him what he should be doing for you.
- B. We are also given indication in our text of how zealous they were.
1. This is shown by the fact that many of them had come a long way.
    - Jesus mentions in verse 3 that some of them have come from afar.
    - Once they heard about this One who did all things well, distance was no barrier for them.
  2. There is also the fact that they remained with Him for three days.
    - As long as He was willing to instruct them, they were willing to stay and listen.
    - They stay until He sends them away—this is remarkable persistence!
    - They were in an eager mood and counted it a great privilege to be able to listen to Him as long as He was willing to stay.

3. We see that many of them stayed even after they had run out of food.
    - When they left home, they likely did not anticipate that He would stay for so long, so they had not brought enough provisions for that long.
    - But they were so enamoured with Jesus that food was hardly even a consideration for them.
    - This is the best kind of fasting—not ritual fasting, but when you are so stirred about seeking the Lord that you forget about eating.
- C. Oh that we might have such a zeal as we see in these Gentiles!
1. It seems to take very little to distract us from hearing our Lord.
    - He has given us access to His word with Bibles, audio sermons, leisure time (that we use for much recreation), and weekly Lord’s Day services.
    - But if the least inconvenience gets in our way, we take it as an excuse.
      - Seldom do we go to any trouble to make our time for God work by moving other things around.
        - For example, if we have to pick someone up from the airport, instead of telling them we will be a few minutes late because we will be at church, we leave church early.
    - We seem to have more endurance for our recreations and our daily work than we do for God’s worship.
      - What can that be attributed to but a lack of zeal?
      - If we have a choice between family worship and supper, family worship is usually the thing to go.
  2. Matthew Henry comments that “True zeal makes nothing of hardships in the [path] way of duty. They that have a full feast for their souls may be content with slender provision for their bodies.”
    - That is certainly true—zeal can make a person forget about food or tiredness.
    - It seems to be the opposite with us.
      - Instead of not noticing hunger or tiredness because we are so engaged in our worship, we often come up with all sorts of worthless and idle thoughts—even when we are at worship or at private prayer.
      - We miss so much of our reading and our praying and hearing of sermons because our minds wonder off and our imaginations run far.
  3. We need to pray that both we ourselves as believers as well as those who do not know the Lord in our community might be given such zeal to seek the LORD.
    - There are places in the world where persecuted believers will assemble for worship at great risk to their families.
      - Sometimes, it can also be very inconvenient to assemble in these contexts because of the need for secrecy.
    - Some of these same places will have unbelievers who take interest and they will also share in this zeal to seek the Lord.
      - That is what happens when the Lord opens their heart and draws them.
      - Nothing will stop them.
    - We need to ask the Lord to create that kind of zeal here in Halifax.

TRANS> But how do we come to have this zeal? What feeds it?

- It comes about when we become enamoured with Jesus Christ—which is a work that the Holy Spirit does in us.
  - That it must be given to us the Holy Spirit should humble us.
    - It should never make us passive so that we say, “Oh well, there is nothing I can do.”
    - Rather, we should exert ourselves with all that is in us to see the glory and beauty of Christ, crying to the Spirit to help us.
- So let’s take a look at just how desirable our Lord Jesus is, even as He is revealed in this very passage.

## II. See the tender compassion of our Lord for these Gentiles.

A. See how He takes notice of their bodily needs.

- In verses 2 & 3, He says: **“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.”**
  1. How excellent is that!
    - They were so concerned about remaining with Him that they forgot all about their daily bread...
      - But Jesus did not forget about their daily bread.
    - Truly, if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things will be added to us.
      - He will look after us if we keep the Lord’s Day and make seeking Him a priority.
      - When we forget to eat because of our zeal for Him, He does not forget us.
        - He is especially passionate about helping them because He knows that their deprivation of food is on account of their desire to remain with Him.
  2. Look at how He describes His feelings when He sees this hungry multitude.
    - He says, “I have compassion on the multitude.”
      - The word translated *compassion* is a word that speaks of one’s vital organs.
        - It speaks of one who is deeply moved from within.
        - It is also used, typically, of compassion for those who are not directly connected to you—those you come in contact with that are outside of your normal circle of friends and relations that you care about.
    - Remember that this is not covenant people—not Israelites—but Gentiles, yet, Jesus is deeply moved when He sees that they are hungry and that some of them have a long way to go to get home.
      - He is very mindful of the consequences of going on a journey when you have not eaten enough.
  3. You see from this that Jesus, who came to save us our souls from Hell, is also concerned about our bodily cares.
    - His compassion extends to every aspect of our lives.

- Never suppose that because He said to seek first the kingdom of God that this means that He is not concerned about our physical welfare.
  - It is the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness who think He takes no notice of our physical needs.
- He made us and He knows that we have to eat and drink.
  - He has experienced living in our body and He has experienced hunger.
    - He did not perform miracles to satisfy His own hunger, but waited until His Father provided for Him through ordinary providence—and He experienced true hunger and pain, especially on the cross.
- Of course, this does not mean that He will never allow us to feel hunger pangs or to have bodily affliction. He often appoints these for us—even as He did for this multitude.
  - But we learn from His compassion and His action that He is not indifferent about our bodily cares.
    - That should give you confidence that if you have them, you have them for a good reason known to Him.
    - He does not willingly afflict us.
      - It is important for you to be sure of that when you are in the pathway of suffering.
  - Part of His plan for us includes the resurrection of bodies.
    - After we have suffered for a while in this world, as is necessary, He will perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle us.
    - This mortal body with all its infirmities will be changed. It will become incorruptible.
      - And from then on, we will never know hunger or pain again.
  - You can see His wisdom with these four thousand in waiting to feed them until their need was great if you think about it.
    - If He had fed such multitudes as a matter of course, they would come to Him for food and never experience the blessing of giving up their food to be with Him.
    - Likewise, if He removed our physical suffering before the time, we would not have the privilege of learning to serve Him with our infirmities and of learning to find our all in Him.
      - We would miss that deepening of our relationship that comes through the fellowship of His sufferings.

TRANS> But He does provide!

- B. Take a look at how He provides food for this multitude on which He has compassion.
- His compassion is not passive—not just empathy—
1. Now that He has pointed out the need to His disciples, they respond to Him in a way that some have thought to be absurd.
    - Verse 4 says: **Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”**

- a. We might be inclined to say, “Have Jesus’ disciples already forgotten? It was not even a full two chapters back that He fed the five thousand in the wilderness.
- “How is it that they could now say, ‘How one can satisfy these people with bread in the wilderness?’ ”
- 1) The liberal commentators have their answer—they suppose that there is only one feeding miracle that morphed into two.
    - They do not adequately answer how it ever got to be in a different place, with different people, with different numbers of baskets and of loaves and of fish and people...
    - And how Matthew and Mark both got the same details and wrote of two feeding miracles, they cannot really explain...
      - But the thing they are sure about is that this feeding of the multitude only happened once—and they, of course, not believing in miracles, suppose that it was that once a boy was willing to share his lunch everyone else got out what they had and there was plenty for all.
      - All this is a nice way to try to get around supernaturalism so they can continue to reject the true God... it is the fruit of a mind that refuses to accept that Jesus really did do miracles.
  - 2) But then we have those who believe that He did do two miracles and that the lesson here is about the blindness and the forgetfulness of the disciples.
    - This is certainly possible—Jesus’ disciples were often blind and forgetful. In fact, Jesus will challenge them for their blindness even about these two feeding miracles later in this very chapter.
      - But what He challenges them about is not so much that these miracles were done, but what these miracles mean about Him.
    - Here, when the disciples ask this question, Jesus does not in any way rebuke them for forgetfulness or anything of the kind.
- b. It seems much more reasonable and charitable to Jesus’ disciples to suppose that they are simply being respectful of the Lord.
- He did not, as a matter of course, provide daily bread in a supernatural way and it would have been presumptuous for them to expect that He would in this case.
  - They do not say that it would not be possible to feed the multitude as they did when Jesus provided for the five thousand, but they simply turn the matter over to Him.
    - They simply ask, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”
    - Commentator James Edwards says it is better translated, “Who is able in this remote region to satisfy these with bread?”
    - William Lane says this is equivalent to asking Him, “What do you intend to do?” Edwards concurs that that is the idea here, and so do other commentators.

- Also, remember that this is a Gentile region.
    - The great question arises here—will Jesus provide for these Gentiles as He provided for the Jews in Galilee?
    - Will He take the children’s bread and give it to the little dogs?
      - This is not a crumb but a meal for four thousand people!
      - It would have been presumptuous to assume that He would.
- c. There is a lesson here for us.
- We are to ask the LORD to give us our daily bread, but we do not expect Him to do this supernaturally.
    - He has not appointed for us to obtain our bread in this way.
    - We are to be responsible to provide for ourselves, by His enablement.
  - At the same time, if we suffer a little hunger because of zeal in our service for Him, it is not sinful negligence...
    - but even then we should not expect Him to feed us by miracles.
    - We should be willing, as these Gentiles were, to suffer a little hunger for His sake.
      - The disciples of Jesus were quite familiar already with missing meals in their service with their Master and they knew that He did not provide for them supernaturally in such cases.
        - We can ask Him to do so—I have seen Him do this before—but we cannot presume that He will do so.
  - The same is true with our sicknesses and other infirmities.
    - We know that He cares, we know that He is compassionate toward us in our suffering, but we must not presume that He will necessarily relieve it until the resurrection—
      - We pray that He will if it is according to His will... and that otherwise we will have patience and enjoy our walk with Him and bring glory to Him in our deprivation and suffering.
2. But you see that Jesus does indeed provide bread in the wilderness for these Gentiles, just as He did in Galilee for the Jews!
- a. He asks what is on hand, just as He did in Galilee.
- Verse 5: **He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.”**
  - With this question, He showed His disciples that He was going to provide for these Gentiles as He had done for the Jews before.
    - Notice that the number is different this time—in fact, there are more loaves though there are less people...
    - This reminds us that whatever means we have on hand the LORD will use because He is not dependent on the means.
      - If our ability is small, it does not limit what He is able to do with us.

- Let me say to you men whom I have been encouraging to lead your families in family worship...
  - If you feel that you are not a strong reader or not a good teacher, do not despair. The Lord does not need greatness to do His work.
  - He looks to work through those who are loyal to him.
    - Whatever you have will be sufficient for the job—if you are sincere and give Him what you have.
    - There are hundreds of other applications!
- What does Jesus do next?
- b. He has the people sit down and He gives thanks for the bread, just like He did in Galilee.
  - You can see that in verse 6: **“So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks...”**
  - You see that Jesus, being in a Gentile region, does not change His course of action in giving thanks to God for the food.
    - If we are the host of a meal, we should not hesitate to do this—it is the duty of a host to bless the food, recognising that it is from God.
- c. He has His disciples distribute the bread and fish, just as He did in Galilee, with the result that all eat and all are satisfied.
  - Verse 6-8: **And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples to set before *them*; and they set *them* before the multitude. <sup>7</sup> They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*. <sup>8</sup> So they ate and were filled...**
  - Jesus provides as fully as He did for the Jews so that they all eat until they have had all that they want.
- d. There are even leftovers, just as there were in Galilee.
  - The rest of verses 8 says: **and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.**
    - It is hard not to notice that with the Jews there were twelve baskets of leftovers, reminding us of the twelve tribes;
      - and that with the Gentiles there were seven large baskets, suggesting full provision for them.
    - Actually, there is significantly more left over with the Gentiles because the baskets are different—these are the large hampers that the Gentiles used rather than the little baskets the Jews were known to carry about with them.
    - The main thing here is that these Gentiles receive more than crumbs that fall from the master’s table!
      - They receive a very full provision with a lot of leftovers!
      - They too have an abundance of leftovers.

TRANS> And that brings us to a conclusion.

**III. See here that Jesus Himself is the bread of life for both Jew and Gentile.**

- A. Remember that His miracles are symbolic... they are signs.
1. By giving bread, He points to Himself as the bread of heaven that God has given to the world.
    - Yes, it is true that He cares for our physical needs.
    - But Jesus is showing us again by this miracle that just as He provided bread for their bodies, so His Father has sent Him from heaven to be God's provision for eternal life.
      - He is the bread of God from heaven that gives life to the world.
  2. That is the great reason He came.
    - To be what we, as sinners, need for forgiveness and eternal life.
      - There is no other provision that will do.
    - It meant that He had to live a life of perfect obedience as our representative and that He had to be the Lamb crucified who takes away the sin of the world.
      - He had to go to the cross and bear the full punishment from His Father for our transgressions.
  3. As we see here, He provides abundantly not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.
    - What a Saviour He is!
- B. Be sure that you—you who profess Him—are indeed resting in Him for your salvation.
1. The Jews did not respond like these Gentiles did because they were full of self-righteousness.
    - We have discussed this before.
      - They did not see their desperate need for forgiveness and cleansing from sin, but rather supposed that they were better than others because they were God's people.
        - It wasn't even on the radar for them that they needed to be forgiven.
  2. And if you don't realise that you are a sinner who needs Jesus for eternal life...
    - Then it won't make sense to you that Jesus is God's provision for forgiveness and life.
    - Now of course it is absolutely true that as God's people who feed on the bread of life, we should have godly lives that the people outside do not have.
      - But having God's word illuminated to us, and having a Saviour like Jesus, the Son of God crucified for our transgressions ought to forever kill any delusion that we are righteous.
        - The fact that God has provided such a Saviour and that He needed to do so because we were in such a wretched sinful state ought to make us humble, not proud...
        - And it ought to make us grateful—not those who come to suppose that God ought to do more for us than He has...
          - not those who act as if He has been negligent or unkind for not giving us all that we want in this world.

- Oh no!
  - Of all people, we who are redeemed should be overawed and filled with gratitude for His great mercy.
    - We should love Him more than those who are just getting to know Him.
    - We should be willing to do anything for Him who has had mercy on our souls and whom we have come to know!
3. These zealous Gentiles are not only a rebuke to us—they are also a wakeup call for us to see the beauty of our Saviour afresh.
- Take a look at Him—delight yourselves in Him.
  - He is the fairest of ten thousand.
    - There is no one like Him who died for us and rose again.