

Satisfies

Jesus satisfies by providing for our needs.

George Muller served as a pastor in Bristol, England. As he grew in his personal relationship with the Lord, he learned a valuable lesson that guided him throughout his ministry. He learned that he could look to the Lord for the resources he needed as he ministered to others. Across the years of his ministry, the valuable lesson that he learned became an unwavering conviction that he embraced. As a result, he lived in the complete certainty the Lord would be faithful to meet his needs as he carried out kingdom tasks.

In 1834, the Lord directed Muller to form a ministry called the “Scriptural Knowledge Institution.” The purpose of the institution was to support Bible study opportunities so people everywhere could learn more about the Lord and His Word. The institution would also help to distribute Bibles and support missionaries as they served the Lord in England and around the world. The need to develop a ministry for the growing number of orphans also became a priority. In order to meet the needs of the institution, George determined that he would look to the Lord alone for the resources.

The Lord proved to be faithful to George and the ministry that he formed. In 1858, he reported that the institution supported more than twenty Bible schools, distributed almost 4,000 copies of the Bible or Scripture portions, shared over 1,000,000 tracts, and supported eighty-two missionaries in their work. Just as remarkable, the Lord used the institution to build orphanages that cared for 1,150 children who had no homes. The outstanding success of the institution demonstrated the Lord’s faithfulness.

An episode recorded in Mark 6:30-44 also validates the Lord’s faithfulness. The account involves a daunting need for food and the faithfulness of Jesus to satisfy the need. Studying the episode will help us to trust Him to satisfy the needs that come our way as we serve Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Mark 6:1-56

Jesus returned to Nazareth, His hometown. He taught in the synagogue, and those present were astonished. Those gathered who had known Him could not reconcile His words with the memories of Him as a carpenter in the village whose family still lived there. Jesus was amazed at their unbelief and could only do a few miracles there (Mark 6:1-6).

Jesus sent His twelve disciples (“apostles,” 3:13-19) on mission under His authority. He sent them in pairs, after giving them instructions on what to take with them, where they should stay, and how they should respond to those who would not receive them. Everywhere the disciples went, they preached a message of repentance, drove demons out of those possessed, and healed the sick (6:7-13).

News about the success of Jesus and His disciples reached Herod Antipas, the ruler of the regions of Galilee and Perea. He believed that John the Baptist had been resurrected. Only recently he had arrested John the Baptist for confronting him about his decision to marry his brother’s wife. Subsequently, Herod had John beheaded (vv. 14-29).

When the twelve disciples returned from their mission, they celebrated their victories with Jesus. In turn, traveling by boat He led them to a remote place so they could get some rest. However, an enormous crowd pursued Jesus and the disciples by land and met them when they came ashore. After He taught them, Jesus and His disciples miraculously fed them (vv. 30-44).

Jesus disbursed the crowd and sent His disciples away in a boat while He withdrew to a mountain so He could pray. In the night, He could see the disciples struggling through a terrible storm. He walked on the water toward them, and He comforted them with the assurance of His presence. As He got into the boat, the storm ceased. What the disciples had witnessed left them astonished. Even though they had only recently witnessed His power at work by feeding the huge crowd, they still could not grasp the full extent of His messianic authority (vv. 45-52).

When the boat arrived on the shore of Gennesaret (on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee), another crowd gathered. As Jesus traveled through the region, people brought the sick to Him so that they could be healed (vv. 53-56).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Rest (Mark 6:30-32)

Serving Christ always proves to be rewarding. Following Him can give us the sense of joyful fulfillment over the ways that He uses us to carry out His work. Jesus celebrated with His disciples when they returned from a successful mission with reports of victories. Also, He led them to give attention to their need to rest for a while. Resting would allow them the opportunity for physical renewal and spiritual reflection.

VERSE 30

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught.

When the **apostles** (the twelve disciples) returned from their mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and calling people to repentance, they had plenty of news to share with Jesus. As they shared their reports, they no doubt celebrated because He had used them to carry out His work. They had been faithful to go under His authority, follow His instructions, and trust Him to provide them with what they needed so they could be effective. Apparently, they had been quite successful. This is only one of two places in Mark's Gospel (see Mark 3:14) where the twelve disciples are identified as *apostles* (*apostolos*, "one sent on a mission, a messenger").

VERSE 31

He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while." For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

After Jesus listened to the reports from His disciples about their mission, He instructed them to get away by themselves and **rest**. He directed them to take their rest by spending some time at a **remote place**. Mark didn't identify the location of the retreat setting. The Greek word for *remote* (*eremos*) indicated an uninhabited region like a wilderness. Jesus knew about the danger of working without resting. In His ministry, He personally practiced the wisdom of taking time to get away. Mark notes that early on in Jesus's ministry, He separated Himself from everyone so He could be alone and pray (1:35).

The swarm of **people** who kept on circulating among the disciples proved that their mission work had been effective. At the same time, the crowds also represented a serious problem for the disciples. The constant demands of ministering to them prevented the disciples from taking care of their own physical needs. They had encountered the same problem earlier as they assisted Jesus in His ministry (3:20). Obviously, addressing the countless needs of the people captured the complete attention of the disciples. They didn't stop long enough to **eat**. Neither did they take the time to get some much-needed rest.

VERSE 32

So they went away in the boat by themselves to a remote place,

In order to get away from the crowds, Jesus and His disciples got in **the boat** and crossed the Sea of Galilee to a **remote place**. Nobody else would be accompanying them, and for good reason. In order for His disciples to rest properly, they had to be separated from the people whose needs had consumed their attention. Mark did not give any specific information about the destination that Jesus had in mind for His disciples. Bible commentators have suggested that the retreat setting was located somewhere on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. That particular region would have also been safe for the disciples because it happened to be beyond the reach of Herod's authority. The fact that Herod had been responsible for the execution of John the Baptist cast a troubling shadow on their safety (6:14-29). The remote place also provided them with a measure of safety from the Jewish leaders who wanted to rid themselves of Jesus (3:6). Only a few, if any people, would have lived in the isolated area, which made it far less stressful than the highly populated Galilean region. The temperature there was usually a little cooler too. It would have been a suitable place for Jesus to pull His disciples aside and prepare them for the challenges that would lie ahead of them.

Explore Further

After the apostles returned from their mission, Jesus took them to a remote place to get some rest. How does this underscore the need of God's people to take rest seriously? In your own life, do you have a good balance between serving God and resting? Do you need to make changes so that you can experience times of rest and recuperation?

Response (Mark 6:33-34)

A crowd was drawn to Jesus because of His ministry to them. His heart went out to them because He could discern their desperate need for spiritual nourishment. He gave Himself to meeting their spiritual need by teaching them.

VERSE 33

but many saw them leaving and recognized them, and they ran on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

Jesus and His disciples did not have the luxury of being anonymous as they left for their retreat. Many of the people in the crowd saw them as they got into the boat and began to make their way across the Sea of Galilee. After they recognized Jesus and His disciples, they set out in pursuit of them, but not by boat. Previously, when Jesus and His disciples traveled across the Sea of Galilee, others got into boats and followed them (Mark 4:36). This time, the crowd following Jesus **ran on foot**.

The determination of the people in the crowd to catch up with Jesus said something about their eagerness to be with Him. According to Luke 9:10, Jesus and His disciples came ashore and met the crowd near a town named Bethsaida. Located on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida was the hometown of the apostles Peter, Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). The exact location of the town has remained a mystery. Some archaeologists suggest that Bethsaida was on the western side of the Jordan River as it flowed south into the Sea of Galilee. Others speculate that the town was located on the eastern side of the river.

VERSE 34

When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things.

Jesus and His disciples had set out on the trip because they needed to get some rest. The crowd pursued Jesus by land because they needed Him. When Jesus saw them as His boat came ashore, what these people needed mattered more to Him than the rest that He and the disciples sought. His heart went out to them, and He **had compassion on them**. The Greek word for *compassion* (*splagchnizomai*) literally referred to bowels or entrails. In the context of empathy, the word served as an appropriate description of compassion.

Jesus's compassion prompted Him to see the crowd as **sheep without a shepherd**. Led by a caring shepherd, a flock of sheep would thrive. A good shepherd would lead them to nourishment, protect them from predators, and oversee their growth and development. Without a shepherd, sheep would become malnourished, tormented by animals that perceived them as prey, and run the risk of losing their way and being hurt or getting killed. In the Old Testament, the picture of sheep without a shepherd served to describe God's people when they didn't have a good leader devoted to God and His people (Num. 27:15-20; 1 Kings 22:17). The image of a shepherd also served to provide God's people with a way of thinking about Messiah (Ezek. 34:23-24). Of course, Jesus used the picture of a shepherd as He described Himself and His relationship with His disciples (John 10:11-18).

Compassion prompted Jesus to care for the people. He put His compassion to work by doing something that would make the biggest difference to them. He gave Himself to teaching them and healed their sick (Matt. 14:14). Obviously, He considered spiritual hunger to be their greatest need. When He taught them about spiritual truths concerning repentance, the kingdom of God, and eternal life (Mark 1:14-15), He provided them with the kind of spiritual nourishment that they needed most.

Explore Further

Read the article "Compassion" on pages 325–326 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. According to the article, the term Jesus used for compassion in the first century primarily referred to courage, but Jesus redefined it. Why does showing compassion sometimes require courage?

Resources (Mark 6:35-38)

As we serve the Lord, we can sometimes fall into the trap of relying solely on our own resources instead of truly depending on God. The disciples fell into this trap when confronted with the need to feed the large crowd that had come to hear Jesus teach. Jesus taught the Twelve that they could depend on Him to supply the resources they needed so they could meet the challenge.

VERSES 35-36

When it grew late, his disciples approached him and said, “This place is deserted, and it is already late. Send them away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.”

When it grew late, the time of day became a concern for Jesus’s **disciples**, and they approached Him. Their concern emerged from three difficult realities: the crowd needed food, the area was deserted, and the day was almost gone.

In their haste to overtake Jesus, there apparently had not been time for the people to gather up any supplies for their meals. Of course, the disciples must have been hungry too. They had been ministering with Jesus at such a non-stop pace that they had not had a chance to eat a meal themselves (Mark 6:31). Their own hunger would have added to their concern for the people who had gathered to be with Jesus.

When the disciples approached Jesus, they offered their solution to the problem. They urged Jesus to release the crowd before darkness fell so they could go in search of something to eat. Nightfall would be coming soon, and the challenge of traveling throughout the **countryside** and into the **villages** at night in order to buy food would be more difficult for them. Taken at face value, the recommendation of the disciples appeared to make good sense. It would provide a simple and reasonable solution to the problem of getting food for the crowd.

VERSE 37

“You give them something to eat,” he responded. They said to him, “Should we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”

The disciples made their recommendation based on a seemingly obvious impossibility. Supplying enough food for the crowd would be absolutely impossible for them. While they had plenty of compassion, they did not have enough resources. Therefore, the sensible solution was to send the people to buy food for themselves and thereby resolve the problem of feeding such a huge crowd. For that reason, the disciples appeared to be somewhat bemused when Jesus replied with what He considered to be a more reasonable approach. **“You give them something to eat.”** His reply took the form of a directive that left no room for doubt that Jesus intended for His disciples to supply the crowd with something to eat.

The dismay of the disciples came through in their reaction to Jesus, a rather pointed and slightly disrespectful question which underscored their shock at His command. **“Should we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”** A denarius amounted to a day’s wage. They questioned Him about the feasibility of taking the equivalent of about eight months’ wages and using it to buy enough food for everyone in the crowd.

VERSE 38

**He asked them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”
When they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”**

Like the disciples, Jesus saw the problem regarding the need to provide food for the crowd. However, His solution didn’t sit well with the disciples because they had not been thinking about the problem in terms of faith in Him. Granted, the disciples had only recently returned from a successful mission under His authority. However, they did not apply their past experience to the challenge they faced regarding the need for food. With Jesus’s direct and blunt reply to their recommendation about providing food, He began to show them how they could trust Him.

Jesus did not set His solution aside because the disciples didn’t seem to agree with Him about it. Instead, He began to guide them so they could learn an important lesson about having faith in Him. He started by directing them to take inventory of the food supplies available to them. They followed His instruction, and they came back with a sobering report. The inventory showed that they possessed only **five loaves** of bread and **two fish**. They set the meager supplies before Jesus. From there, Jesus would teach them that they could feed the multitude by looking to Him.

Explore Further

Consider the different approaches offered by Jesus and His disciples to the challenge they faced in feeding the people. Which approach do you usually take when you serve the Lord? Do you start with prayer that God will supply what you need or do you move straight into planning and action? Even if the supplies for your ministry are already available, why is it a good idea to start with prayer focusing on your dependence upon God for everything?

Relief (Mark 6:39-44)

When we trust Jesus to provide us with what we need to minister to others, we can experience fresh joy when we touch the lives of others using the resources that He alone can give. As Jesus performed the miracle with five loaves and two fish, His disciples no doubt looked on with wonder. They also surely experienced a keen sense of satisfaction as they shared in Jesus's work by distributing the food that He provided.

VERSES 39-40

Then he instructed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

A hungry crowd could have easily turned into an unruly mob at the sight of food. Instead of allowing such chaos, Jesus took command of the situation and directed the disciples to seat everyone in groups. The Greek word for **groups** (*sumposion*) paints a picture of a banquet in which friends gathered in festive company with each other. Mark noted that Jesus wanted them to sit on the **green grass**, indicating it was the season of spring. It is the only time of the year when there is abundant green grass. It also hearkened back to the Old Testament picture of a devoted shepherd who would guide his sheep so they would be nourished with the green grass in the pastures (Ps. 23:2). Seating the people **in groups of hundreds and fifties** would have brought to mind the way that Moses clustered God's people as they made their way through the wilderness during the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 18:25).

VERSE 41

He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

Jesus didn't see a problem in their lack of inventory. Quite the opposite; He took the food in hand, looked toward **heaven**, and **blessed** it, honoring God and expressing gratitude for the food (John 6:11). Then Jesus performed the miracle of multiplying the bread. First, He **broke the loaves** of bread into pieces. Then He gave the bread to His disciples to share with all of the people as they sat on the grass. He followed the same procedure with **the two fish**. The miracle affirmed Jesus as Messiah.

However, Jesus directed His disciples to distribute the food to the people. They enjoyed the satisfaction of serving Him as Jesus gave them the bread and fish to distribute to the crowd. Incidentally, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13).

VERSES 42-44

Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were five thousand men.

Usually, people in those days did not keep on eating a meal until they were **satisfied**. Instead, they kept on eating until the food was consumed. They would enjoy the privilege of eating until they wanted no more food only on special occasions like weddings, festivals, or banquets. Therefore, the miracle that Jesus performed gave the people in the crowd a rare blessing. They probably never would have considered the remote area to be the setting for a banquet meal. There was also food to spare after His disciples distributed it to everyone. Instead of barely providing everyone with only a morsel, Jesus fed the people lavishly with His miracle.

Mark noted that the crowd consisted of **five thousand men**. A staggering number in itself, it did not include the women and children who accompanied the men to see Jesus (Matt. 14:21). All of them experienced the abundant blessings provided by the miracle that Jesus performed. With the miracle, Jesus verified His identity as the awaited Messiah. At the same time He exhibited His compassion, blessing the people who came to Him by satisfying their needs for both spiritual and physical nourishment. His disciples experienced the blessing that came with serving Him, as well as having ample leftovers with which to nourish themselves.

Explore Further

Compare Mark 6:39-44 with Exodus 16:1-23 and 1 Kings 17:8-16. Both of the Old Testament accounts involve the miraculous provision of food. Who was responsible for both of the miracles? What do the two Old Testament accounts affirm about Jesus as He performed the miracle of feeding five thousand?
