

## THE LOVE OF GOD IS GREATER FAR THAN TONGUE OR PEN CAN EVER

### TELL (Mk. 8:1-10)

**Mk. 8:1** In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, <sup>2</sup>I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: <sup>3</sup>And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. <sup>4</sup>And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? <sup>5</sup>And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. <sup>6</sup>And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. <sup>7</sup>And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. <sup>8</sup>So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. <sup>9</sup>And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away. <sup>10</sup>And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.

Some months earlier the Lord Jesus had travelled about fifty miles from the north-western shores of the Sea of Galilee, through the countryside, out of the land of Israel and away from the Jews and on towards the Gentile city of Tyre, on the Mediterranean Sea coast (Mk. 7:24) ... He then went about another twenty miles north to another Gentile city called Sidon, before returning southwards to the north of the Sea of Galilee, then along the eastern side and into the Gentile region known as the Decapolis, the 'ten cities' (v.31). All the while, He is teaching and training His disciples. ... So He has gone from the Jews to the Gentiles to the Jews again, - very briefly, - ... and on to the Gentiles again.

He knew many of His disciples would be bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, which in itself was a mighty hurdle for them to overcome. The good news of the Messiah was a purely Jewish concept that had been in the Jewish minds for centuries, but, as far as they were concerned it had little-to-no bearing on the Gentile world. ... The only bearing it would have on the Gentiles, the Jews believed, was that their Messiah would reign, and the Jewish nation with Him.

So, the Messiah was coming to be the King of the Jews, the promised successor to King David, as prophesied by the prophets. Therefore, the Gentiles weren't worth bothering with, - it had nothing to do with them. ... That is not what Jesus was teaching though as He brought His disciples through the region of Decapolis for that is where He was taking them to show how the Gospel is to be preached to everyone, regardless of where they come from.

In that Gentile region, a very great multitude (v.1) had been following Jesus for three days. Regardless of *why* they were following Him, He made the opportunity for one final display of God's glory and grace among these

people. ... And, at the same time, He was also re-illustrating the challenge to His Jewish disciples that His plan of salvation included the Gospel to be preached to everybody, - all nations, - including these godless and idolatrous Gentiles they normally would have rejected and overlooked.

... If we try to look at this passage from a Jewish perspective, it would give us an idea of the ingrained animosity of the Jews towards the Gentiles ... one they would have grown up with. After all, who are they, *Gentiles* ... living in our land?! They shouldn't be here. They are not as good as us. They are from 'here, there, and yonder'. They are not dependable. You can't trust them. They are made up of 'all-sorts'. They are 'wasters', and to be avoided.

And then, on the other hand, the acrimony and bad feeling went both ways because the Gentiles didn't like the Jews either. To them, the Jews were an obnoxious and vain people. They wouldn't 'have gotten out of your way'. When they stared at you, you could see in their eyes how they 'looked down' on you. ... And really, the people of Decapolis, - at that time, - would not have accepted Jesus the Jew but for the fact He was serving a purpose of healing and performing miracles among their people. ... There was no other earthly reason why these Gentiles were attracted to *this* Jew. In fact, following the previous incident of the man Legion being liberated from demonic possession, - in this same area of Decapolis, - the locals *chased* Jesus, [5:17](#) *And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts* ... Jesus the Jew, we don't want You here! ... It probably would have been different if He had healed someone out of their own 'decent' families ... but He hadn't for He had healed a man 'from the bottom of the pile' so therefore, it didn't count and they wanted Him to leave.

There was, indeed, a very definite 'them and us' mentality. ... And that was the general attitude between the Jews and the Gentiles of this region ... and yet Jesus brought His disciples through that area to teach His disciples the good news of salvation was to be extended to all, [Mk. 16:15](#) *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel.*

Yes, Jesus was starting with the Gentiles close to His home. Is that not where all work for the Lord should begin ... at home? If you cannot love the people you have been born amongst, and if your greatest burden is not to see them saved ... how could you hope to love the people anywhere else?! ... Does the training not begin at home, and among our own?!

So, if you like, Jesus was starting His programme of world evangelism as He led His disciples to the Syro-Phoenician woman in Tyre, and back down through the hills to the Gentile region of Decapolis. ... God never takes us anywhere He does not have a reason for and neither does He take us anywhere He does not expect us to serve Him!

Previously, He had fed the five thousand-plus in Mk. 6:34-44. This is now a different occasion where He feeds the four thousand ... We note in Matthew's account of this miracle he records, [Mt. 15:38](#) *And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.* ... This could have been anything up to about fifteen thousand people.

But the main emphasis in *this* passage is that it demonstrates the compassion of God towards Gentiles. ... Remember what Isaiah said, and which Simeon quoted at the circumcision of Jesus in the temple, [Lk. 2:28](#) *Then took he [Simeon] him [the baby Jesus] up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

[32 A light to lighten the Gentiles](#) ... That's you and me ... and the people on the eastern coastline of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came to be the salvation of both Jew and Gentile. If He had only come to save the Jews, we would be lost ... and He would not have entered the Decapolis. If He had only come to save the Jews the Gospel would not have arrived on our shores ... What grace that God included us Gentiles in His plan of salvation! ... It is absolutely amazing, - as Paul described, - that we have been 'broken off' the 'wild olive tree' and carefully 'grafted in' to the 'good olive tree'. By God's grace we have been saved [For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them \(Eph. 2:10\).](#)

And that is what Jesus was teaching the disciples ... that *even* Gentiles are to be saved! It does not matter where you come from, Christ can save you! It does not matter how you were brought up, or what you were taught to believe ... Christ can save you! That was the message Jesus was teaching His disciples.

... Imagine, following the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, ... and then when it came time for the Gospel to be preached in Jerusalem, and all those Jews were saved ... that was *fine* because it was being preached to Jews ... But then imagine, when the apostles were sent out to Samaria ... what a shock *that* would have been to the system if Jesus had not already trained them the Gospel *was also* for the Gentiles! If He had not already taught them, they would have found it so difficult to share their message outside of their own people!

The Gospel is not just for *some* people, but for all. It is not up to us to decide to whom it should be shared. ... The Gospel is for all to hear so that none will be without excuse (Rom. 1:20), ... so that none will be able to say, I didn't know... ... And here is where we see again the compassion of the Lord Jesus.

These people of Decapolis had all kinds of needs ... but their greatest need was the need they did not realise they had ... they needed to hear the Gospel and to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. No other need is as great as that. Yes, millions of people are starving, but the priority of God's people is to share the Gospel, ... anything else replaces what God has sent His people to do. The state of a person's soul is of the greatest value for it determines where they will spend eternity. Yes, Jesus met their physical need, - by feeding them, - but it was a step along the way for meeting their greater spiritual need.

In these verses, - Mk. 8:1-9, - there are a number of features familiar to us through our previous study in the feeding of the 5000+ in chapter six. There are, however, also some elements highlighted in this story that were not as much to the fore previously.

For example, **Mk. 8:1** In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him ... That is an interesting phrase for it indicates the disciples were not immediately at Jesus' side, - they were somewhere close so that they could hear Him *call* ... but I wonder where they were, since He had to *call* them. Would it not have been lovely if they were mingling among these people and speaking with them about the Gospel of the Kingdom? ... Would it not also have been lovely if they had been with Jesus hanging on to His every word, - learning from Him, - as He spoke individually to these people He healed ... Or I wonder ... and I hope I would be wrong ... if they were gathered away in a 'huddle' by themselves, - a Jewish clique, all twelve of them, - cut off from those Gentiles because they didn't want to be

seen with them or to have anything to do with them, much less be in their company. ... I wonder if they enjoyed being there, or if they were looking forward to getting 'out' and back to their 'own kind'.

Anyhow, Jesus pressed home the point to them, <sup>2</sup> *I have compassion on the multitude*. ... That's a strong statement! ... Was that a surprise to the disciples ... that Jesus would have compassion towards the Gentiles? It certainly was not 'normal'. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem definitely would not have said such a thing! ... A Jew having compassion on a multitude of Gentiles ... not likely! ... Nevertheless, that is what Jesus said ... and He said it because He meant it!

Did His disciples not notice the compassion He had for these Gentiles? If not, why not? Where were they looking ... that Jesus had 'to spell' it out to them?! ... Did such a statement mean anything to them? Well, it should have because Mark used a very special word to describe how Jesus felt. The Greek word (Σπλαγχνίζομαι) literally means Jesus said, I am 'moved to my bowels' ... Whereas the heart is the seat of *our* feelings and emotions, the Jews referred to the bowels as the place from where their feelings and emotions arose ... <sup>2</sup> *I have compassion on the multitude*. ... Christ's compassion came from deep within.

And that is where His love comes for you and me. He is the compassionate Saviour. He is the God of love Who loved us from before we first loved Him ... Who loved us in spite of what we are ... Who loved us to the point He died for us on the cross of Calvary ... Who loved us more than we could anticipate.

It is the same description Mark used in relation to the leper who came to Jesus near the beginning of His ministry, <sup>1:40</sup> *And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. <sup>41</sup> And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him [... the leper!], and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. ... That is how Jesus saved you ... He was moved with compassion towards you ... but why? The hymn writer has written,*

Who am I that the King would bleed and die for?  
 Who am I that He would pray not my will, but Thine Lord?  
 The answer I may never know  
 Why He ever loved me so,

But to that old rugged cross He'd go  
For who am I?

On Thursday our nation made a momentous decision ... and yet, it is as nothing compared with you making the decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own and personal Saviour. That's a decision which was already signed and sealed in eternity and for which Jesus died as your ransom at Calvary,

Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.

And Jesus went to the countryside of these despised Gentiles ... why? ... because, as He said, <sup>2</sup>I have compassion on the multitude.

But we must also take into account their bodily needs, <sup>2</sup> I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: <sup>3</sup> And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. ... They have been with Him for three days, sleeping out on the ground. When He began His work in the mornings, they were there, ready and waiting ... and when He finished in the evening, they were there also. They didn't leave Him. ... What a beautiful scene it is to experience Galilee at any time of the day or night, but those people were not there for the scenery ... they were there because they were *compelled* to be there by the Saviour's presence.

This is the only recorded occasion Jesus went to this area, specifically to the south-eastern shore. The people are watching Him perform all the healings, and they have never seen anything like this before. They did not want to leave Him, and they put their hunger for food to the one side. They are so overwhelmed with Jesus! And He knew if He sent them home, *they will faint by the way*, - they will simply not make it ... they will 'fall apart' (έκλύω)!

Who were they, again? They were Gentiles ... idol-worshipping Gentiles who would not have given a thought to Jesus before that day. Why waste time worrying about them?! ... That is not how Jesus saw it for He had *compassion on the multitude*. ... The King of Glory and a people foreign to His grace!

As on the previous occasion, the disciples came up with the problem ... <sup>4</sup> From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? ... It is sad

how we never learn! It must have been frustrating for Jesus ... Were they ever going to learn?! Just a few months earlier He had fed a far greater number, and yet it doesn't seem as if they had remembered, or if they had learned anything. ... But, I suppose an added consideration was, why bother going to any trouble *for Gentiles*? ... Maybe if it was for some of our own ... but it's not ... it's for *them*!

It must be frustrating for the Lord when we are so slow to learn. After all, He had healed the daughter of the Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman, and He had healed the deaf and dumb man ... and so many more during those last three days ... If Jesus did not have compassion for the Gentiles He would not have done any of those things, but He did, so therefore, the disciples should also have had compassion for those Gentiles. ... Basically, if *Jesus* loves them, *we* should love them too!

So He enquired, <sup>5</sup> How many loaves have ye? And they [*the disciples*] said, Seven ... and they also had a few small fishes (v.7). They know he has the power to feed all those people for He had fed a greater number before, <sup>6</sup> And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground [... *not the 'green grass', as in 6:39*]: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. <sup>7</sup> And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. ... Now, can you see what is happening? ... Here are Jews feeding and *servicing* Gentiles, in the middle of Gentile country, surrounded only by Gentiles! This was a miracle in itself! ... It is incredible what God's grace achieves, even among God's people ... in how it changes them!

And Jesus did exactly the same with these Gentiles as He had previously done to the Jewish multitude. ... He did not have one programme for the Jews and a different one for the Gentiles ... it was both the same. ... Gentiles are *healed* the same way, and Gentiles are *saved* the same way! ... He prayed to His Father, - He did not disguise His prayer so as not to offend these idol-worshippers. ... He prayed to His Father ... and the same answer to prayer fed the Gentiles as it had previously fed the Jews. There was no difference, - both were hungry, and both were fed, both were needy ... and Christ supplied that need, and everyone, - on both occasions, - were filled, and again both had 'left-overs'.

... It shows us that in the plan of God there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile for when both were needy, He provided *for both*, as Paul wrote, **Eph. 2:18** For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. **19** Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God. ... Jew and Gentile made one in Christ!

What a lesson! **Mk. 8:8** So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. ... “God loved the world of sinners lost ... Let all the ransomed sing, And triumph in the dying hour Through Christ our Lord and King”. Salvation has no labels of nationality attached. It doesn't matter whether it is a Jew or a Gentile, rich or poor, educated or not ... Salvation is for all who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour!

There was none excluded that day. There was none told they could not eat. They were all provided for. They all went away filled ... and that was the testimony each of them had of Jesus.

I'm not saying they were saved ... just as I would never say everyone who hears the Gospel believes in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is only accepted when the Holy Spirit opens up the individual's heart to believe. Simply hearing the Gospel does not save anyone ... to be saved you must *confess* with your mouth the Lord Jesus, *believe* the Gospel and then, – wrote Paul, - *thou shalt be saved* (Rom. 10:9).

From there Jesus boarded the boat and sailed diagonally from the south-east of the Sea of Galilee all the way up to the north-west to Dalmanutha, not too far from Capernaum. ... Matthew calls it Magdala/Magadan (Mt. 15:39), - it is the region from where Mary Magdalen came. ... He has returned to Galilee (the Jewish part) and, - as far we know, - He was not along that eastern shore again (the Gentile part). ... They, - the Gentiles, - were given their opportunity to believe. Many of their people had been healed by Him ... but healing is only on the outside whereas the transformation of the soul is the work of God on the inside.

When God gives you an opportunity, you ought to grasp at it for it is precious. If you are not saved, it is a privilege to be told about Jesus, and how He died on the cross, and how your life will change when you believe in Him and accept Him as your Saviour.

And for the believer ... when God gives us an opportunity to serve Him, the opportunity becomes the responsibility! That is what Jesus was teaching His disciples in Tyre, and in Sidon, and throughout the Decapolis. The hymn-writer wrote, "Where He may lead me I will go, For I have learned to trust Him so" ... He often takes us places we would not ordinarily go ... but He always has a reason for bringing us there. And that is the lesson the Master was teaching His disciples. May it be the lesson we learn also! Amen.