

BREAD IN THE WILDERNESS

Matt. 15:29-39

It has been a tough week in the life of our nation and in the life of our world. On the world front, threats of economic collapses in Greece and Italy have the financial markets teetering on the edge, with the ominous clouds of another global recession on the horizon. On the home front, you do not even have to be a football fan to be sickened by the events that came to light in State College, Pa. Not only did a child predator continue on his rampage of abuse unabated after being caught, but when he was finally arrested a good man who had done immeasurable good for 60 years took the fall with him. I'm not saying that Joe Paterno was free from guilt, but the ending to his brilliant life of service to Penn State University is still heartbreaking.

But that is not all. In Mississippi, where more people go to church than any state in the nation, voters rejected a ballot initiative to declare that life begins at conception, and along with it an opportunity to take a huge step toward the death of the death industry of abortion. Where were the Christians on voting day? But even closer to home, Jefferson County has filed the largest municipal bankruptcy petition in U.S. history, in part because of the corruption of two politicians and a business man who are now in federal prison. But the most heartbreaking event of all to Christians who heard about it was the news that a Southern Baptist evangelist was recently arrested in Arkansas on charges of video voyeurism. It's been a tough week.

But beloved, the happenings I've just mentioned are only the physical symptoms of a much more serious spiritual problem. We live in a nation and a world that is spiritually dead. As a nation we have no moral compass. The devil is our father and Jesus said that we desire to do his will (Jn. 8:44). And Jesus said that the devil's will was to steal, kill, and destroy (Jn. 10:10). And with all of the wickedness that we see going on all around us, who can deny that we are indeed killing and destroying ourselves? But it is because we are spiritually dead. But Jesus also said that the only hope for anyone who is spiritually dead is that they receive and feed upon the Bread of Life, which is He Himself. Jesus said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst". The answer to all of the crises of this old world is not rocket science. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternally blessed God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! You may be thinking, "Now, Bro. Mike. How can you be so simplistic?" It is easy. For you see, when Jesus redeems the soul He also redeems the conduct. Men change the way

they live. And when Jesus redeems enough souls, their conduct redeems the culture.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 13:11, "...now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed". Beloved, truer words could never be spoken!! Jesus is coming soon! And if there has **ever** been a time when the people of God need to wake up and step up and rescue the perishing and care for the dying and feed them the Bread of Life it is now! And today I want us to allow God's Word to challenge us to do it!

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Matthew 15:29-39. In our text this morning we see a very graphic picture of the awesome spiritual need of all mankind and of the wonderful provision that God has given to meet that need in Jesus Christ His Son. Matthew tells us that a multitude of people had come to Jesus up on a mountain. But notice, Matthew tells us that it was a great multitude. We do not know how many that Matthew considered to be "a great multitude", but it must have been around 10,000 or more, for he tells us that it was 4,000 men plus women and children. That's a pretty big mountaintop congregation. But the multitude was not only great, the need was great. These people had not eaten in three days.

I want us to try to wrap our minds around the tremendous challenge facing the disciples this day. Jesus was about to ask 12 men to feed 10,000 people. Now, there are over 100 of us in this auditorium this morning. What if I had come in this morning and announced to you that I had just gotten a call from Billy Gray at our Baptist association office and there was a group of people in Fosters this morning that needed our help. That there was a bus with 50 people on it on the way to our church, none of them have eaten in three days, and they were desperately hungry. And then I said, "Billy, it won't be easy, but I think we can feed them if we all pitch in. We'll dismiss the service and I'll send Janice and a few others back to the kitchen to start pulling leftovers out of the refrigerator and freezer, and the rest of us can go home and bring our Sunday lunch right back and we can do it".

But what if Billy were to say to me, "Mike, I must tell you that there is more than just one bus load. There are nine more buses parked down at Myrtlewood School, and another 10 at Monty Stamp's old store, and another 30 across the highway at the softball fields. And there are 25 parked at the boat landing on Glass House road, and there are 75 parked in the new parking lot in front of the Fosters Supermarket, and there are 50 parked on the side of the road between

the interstate and Hwy. 11. 200 buses in all, 10,000 people. Do you think you can feed all of them?” What would you have told Billy?

Beloved, I want you to please listen closely. There is a great multitude of people in this world today who are starving. But I'm not talking about physically starving at this point. I'm talking about those who are spiritually starving, billions and billions, starving for the Bread of Life. And the number of truly born-again Christians in this world are many, many less – very few in comparison. Jesus said it Himself. He said, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14). So the number of lost people are far greater than the number of saved people, and yet Jesus has commanded us, “Go and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). And we don't have to go back to the original Greek to understand what those words mean. We are to proclaim the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to every living soul on the earth.

If Billy Gray had asked me if we could feed 10,000 people with just an hour or two's notice, I'm afraid to say what I would have told him. I hope I would have said, “Billy, by the miraculous power of God alone we'll do it”. But I do know this. When Jesus called upon 12 men to feed 10,000, they did it. They fed many more than they or anyone else would have expected. And if Grant's Creek is going to be obedient to Jesus in His command to us to feed the hungry with the Bread of Life, then we are going to have to go to many more people than we think that we possibly can.

But beloved, when we go, we don't need to forget the awful plight that those without Jesus are in. They are not only starving, they are starving to death, and they are starving in the wilderness. Now, concerning the 10,000 Jesus said, “I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way”. The wilderness was a terrible place to be if you were hungry. That's because the wilderness was harsh and hostile. There were no markets there, no restaurants there, and no place for the multitudes to find bread there. Left in the wilderness long enough, you would die.

And in the same manner, this old world is a spiritual wilderness, a spiritual wasteland, and it is harsh and hostile. It is a world where very few people really care about anyone but themselves, and where many people will exploit anyone they can, and if so be it, even to their destruction. Listen to the prophet Isaiah describing the ungodly world in which we live: “No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth...They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; He

who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out.....Their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood....they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.” (Is. 59:4-5; 6-8).

That’s the picture of the world in which we live. A world where sin abounds. A world where people like the Penn State child molester are rushing down the path to destruction and destroying countless other lives as they go. And beloved, the number being destroyed is staggering. According to pastor David Platt, there are 30 million adults and children in the world who are slaves in the sex industry. 30 million victims of rape for a price, every year, many times a year. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. The wilderness is a place of life-shortening drug and alcohol addiction, poverty by gambling addiction, and shattered lives by divorce. The wilderness is harsh, hostile, and ugly.

But the wilderness is not only a place where sin abounds, it is a place where there is no gospel. You’ll never find a citizen of the wilderness telling anyone about Jesus. There are no soul winners in the bars of Tuscaloosa. There’s no preaching in the gentlemen’s clubs in Birmingham. There are no prayer meetings at Greenetrack. Beloved, unless someone goes into the wilderness with the Bread of Life and feeds those who are starving there, they are without hope. They will perish in their sins.

But let me say here that if you have never genuinely repented of your sins and trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior that you are a citizen of the wilderness. You are perishing in your sins this very moment. For in Romans 3 Paul quotes the very same passage we just read from Isaiah when he describes the sinful nature of every man. Paul says that none of us were righteous at one time, that we were all sinners, that we all had feet that ran toward evil and that we all shed innocent blood. Friends, do not be deceived! You don’t have to be a serial killer or just a petty thief to go to hell. James 2:10 says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”. Only one sin makes you a sinner, and the wages of that sin is death.

And friends, the only thing that gets you off that path toward destruction and death is to partake of the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. You must believe that He is God’s only Son Who left Heaven’s glory, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and then paid the penalty for your sins on the cross as God’s perfect sacrifice. And believing that, you must cry out to Him, confessing your sins, begging His forgiveness, and trusting Him alone as the Ruler of your life and the

Savior of your soul. God says in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved". And if you've never trusted Christ, that is what He is calling you to do today.

So we see that the multitude that came to Jesus was in desperate need of food, but that there was no food to be found in the wilderness, and that made for a desperate situation. But I want us to notice three things that saved the day for the hungry multitude. And these three things should encourage any child of God who desires to reach anyone who is lost without Christ. First of all, we see that **the Lord was compassionate**. Jesus could have let the multitudes go away hungry. No one was expecting Him to feed them. The disciples surely weren't. Even though they had seen Him just recently feed perhaps 12,000 or more near the Sea of Galilee, it didn't cross their minds that He could or would do it again. And the multitudes weren't expecting Jesus to feed them. But Jesus looked at them, hungry and about to get hungrier, some of them weak and about to get weaker. And Jesus' heart went out to them in loving compassion and He fed them.

Beloved, here is our hope! Here is our hope for ourselves, and here is our hope for the world. **Jesus has compassion!!** At one time in the past we were in the middle of the wilderness, not even knowing it, but lost in our sins, enemies of God, headed for hell. And Jesus came to us in love and mercy, convicted us of our lost condition, and drew us to Himself, and we trusted Him and we were saved. But were it not for His compassion for us we would have perished. And beloved, you can be certain that the compassion that Jesus had for you and me He has for every living human being. Every person you meet driving down the road, or at the post office, or at Subway. Every boy and girl at Myrtlewood, every person in the aisles of Wal Mart, every person in the United States, every tribesman in the darkest jungle of South America, every Eskimo in Alaska. Jesus created them with His own hand, Jesus paid for their sins with His own blood, and Jesus has compassion on them and longs that they be saved. And if we venture to go into the wilderness with the Bread of Life, we can be sure that Jesus is glad we are going!

Let me tell you about Nathan Creitz. Nathan is the son of a friend of mine, John Creitz, and He is probably about 31-32 years old now. Nathan grew up in Texas and later Alabama when his parents moved back from seminary. And at some point Nathan was saved and called into the ministry. But Nathan's call was more specific than some. He felt that God was calling him to do missions in the Northeast. So he packed up seven years ago and moved to Boston, where he worked with college students as he worked on his own seminary degree. After

finishing seminary he and his wife, who is a New Yorker, continued to assist their church while the church looked for a pastor. And when this work was done, they began to ask God, “OK, Lord, what’s next?”

And on Oct. 20th God showed them. The Lord made it clear to both of them that He wanted them to go to New York City, to the borough of Queens, and start a church. This is where Nathan’s wife is from, and her family has no Christians. In fact, the number of evangelical Christians in Queens is only 2%. 2% is the point where our IMB considers anything less to be an unreached people group, the most unevangelized classification of persons that they chart. And Nathan says that if Queens was an incorporated town of its own it would be the 4th largest city in the U.S. And God told Nathan and his wife, “I have compassion on the multitudes in Queens and I want you to take the Bread of Life to them”. And so they said, “We’ll go”. Listen to what Nathan wrote in his newsletter this week: “We have no apartment (yet). We have no source of income (yet) for at least the next 2 months. We have no team (yet) and no monthly financial supporters (yet) and we have a 2 year old and a 3 month old to care for. However, we are both virtually stress free and have an incomprehensible peace about our calling”. And beloved, I can tell you that God is smiling because Nathan Creitz is taking a bold step of faith to take the gospel of Christ into the wilderness of Queens, NY. And do you know what my thoughts are? If a southern born and bred boy like Nathan Creitz can go to New York City, plant his life and with the compassion of Jesus share the good news of His saving grace, what’s stopping me from sharing Christ with everyone I can right here in Fosters and Ralph?

But there is something else that encourages us if we would take the Living Bread into the wilderness. Not only was **Jesus compassionate**, but **Jesus was Provider**. As we said earlier, Jesus was about to ask His disciples to feed 10,000 people. That’s 833 people apiece. And all that they had to do it with was seven loaves and a few small fish. Was Jesus being unreasonable with them? Demand something they were incapable of doing? Well, yes and no. What He was asking was certainly unreasonable. No way they could come up with the bread and fish to feed so many. But were they incapable of doing it? NO!! For they didn’t have to provide the food. When it got time for dinner, Jesus said to the disciples, “Bring what you have to Me.” And Jesus took the bread and the fish, prayed over them, broke them, and passed them out to the disciples, who took what Jesus gave them and fed all 10,000 people.

Matthew writes that all who were present that day “ate and were filled”. And I can just see Peter and the rest walking through the multitudes offering seconds and they were all shaking their heads and patting their tummies, smiling

and saying, “No thanks”. So the disciples gathered up all the fragments that were left and there were seven large baskets left over. Some Christians may think, “Why seven baskets? When Jesus fed the 5,000 plus their families there were 12 baskets left over. Why less this time?” Well, there’s a good chance it wasn’t less. For the baskets were large baskets. They were different from the baskets that were used to gather the leftovers from feeding the 5,000. The Greek word for these baskets indicates they were more like a hamper. It was the same word that Luke used when he said that Paul was lowered down from the wall of Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:25). And the seven baskets here very likely contained more leftovers than the twelve. But the point is, dear ones, Jesus’ provisions are abundant!! It was more than they ever needed or wanted.

Beloved, we could talk all day long about how little is much when God is in it. Samson took a jawbone of a donkey and killed a thousand Philistines. Gideon and his 300 whipped a Midianite army of 120,000. Elisha filled up jar after jar with oil, pouring from only one vessel, until all the empty jars were filled, and would have poured more had the woman of the house brought them. But you can be sure of this. The God of Samson, Gideon, and Elijah is my God and your God, and He will multiply the efforts of whoever dares to trust Him to do more than we could ever ask or think!

But notice one more thing that is so encouraging. Not only was **Jesus the Provider**, but **the provision was sufficient**. Matthew said that they ate and were filled. But that means more than their bellies were full. It also means that they were satisfied. They were thinking, “What a spread! That was deeeeeelicious!” Beloved, let me tell you something about the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. Jesus is sufficient!! When you taste of the Living Bread you don’t want anything else to eat. Your search to fill your hungry soul has ceased. David wrote, “O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps. 34:6). Paul wrote, “You are complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). And metaphorically speaking Solomon wrote, “Your love is better than wine” (Song of Solomon 1:2). But there are still countless numbers who’ve never even had anyone to tell them to taste and see that the Lord is good. And they are on a desperate search to fill the gnawing vacuum deep in their souls. And when they finally do hear about Jesus Christ and His compassion for them, many run to Him with all of their might, and they are saved and satisfied.

Let me tell you about Terry Hallman. Terry is the chaplain of the Tuscaloosa County Jail. I ran into Terry this week, and he was bubbling over with his story. He told me that God is doing marvelous things in the jail ministry, that they just need more Bibles to pass out and more people to go in the cells

and share the gospel. He told me how someone had given one prisoner a Bible and how he threw it down in disgust, and it landed open in the book of Job. But for some reason he started to read, read the whole book of Job, and then asked the guard to send for Terry. And Terry came and led him to Christ. Oh, friends, the Bread of Life is sufficient, even in the book of Job!

I ask you, have you found the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, sufficient? Are you feasting on Him today? If you are not, won't you come and be saved today? And if you are, dear, precious brother and sister, will you say, "Lord, however you can use me, I'll go and take some bread to the wilderness?"