

Only the compassion of God can satisfy us. When God created Adam, he provided for his every need. There was nothing lacking for the man and his wife. They knew God, who made them in his own image according to his own love and mercy. To know God's compassion is to be satisfied with everything God gives you. It is to know that your bread, your shelter, your clothing, and every earthly pleasure comes from God's fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in you. If you know this, then you have peace. You have righteousness. You have God's kingdom. You have every inheritance of heaven. In other words, you have enough. As David sings in the Psalm, "The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want."

Those who don't know the compassion of God can never have enough. They can never be satisfied. It's true that they can convince themselves that they have enough, that their hands have worked hard enough, and that their barns and bank accounts are full enough. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who paid no attention to God, convinced that his soul would be at rest just because of how much grain he had. But this man was a fool, because he didn't consider that his soul needed to be nurtured by God. It's possible to convince yourself that you have enough, that you can be at rest, retired, living out your golden years, and hanging your hat on your own achievements. But if you do not know the compassion of God, then you can never be satisfied in your soul. Because even though you have, for the moment, everything you want, all of these earthly things will be taken from you the instant you close your eyes in death.

When Jesus looked at the multitude of four thousand, he felt sorry for them. He had compassion on them. He was moved in his own heart and soul, longing to help them. So he multiplied seven loaves of bread and a few fish. He had done the same thing for a crowd of five thousand not long before this. There is no question that Jesus is the Lord. He is the creator and provider of all things. But what moves him to do this? It's his great compassion and mercy. He says, "They've been with me three days now and have nothing to eat. If I let them go home without eating, they will become exhausted on the road. Some of them have come a long way."

In other words, Jesus knows them. He knows what they have been through. He cares about their every need. Before they can consider their own need, he already has it in his heart. He uses his great power as the creator of all things, not to placate an irritable mob, as if he only wants to give them enough so they would leave him alone. No, he is moved inside of his soul for every one of them, desiring to give them even more than they need. He loves them. They have been feeding on his words for three days, learning that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. But the same God who speaks nurturing words to the soul also cares about their bodies.

This is God's compassion toward us. He knows when we need to go without comforts in this life. He knows when we need to be tested with hunger or sadness. But the Lord who tests our souls is the same Lord who created our bodies. And he cares about your hunger before you do. Before you have even thought about what your body needs, he has already been moved by his own great compassion to provide for you.

When I was a student at the seminary, my wife and I were out to eat in Niagara on the Lake, Ontario. It was a Sunday afternoon, and some of the people in the restaurant were in their church clothes. I noticed one guy wearing a clerical collar. So I approached him and asked him if he was a pastor. He was an Anglican priest somewhere in that area. I then introduced myself and told him that I was studying to be a Lutheran pastor. When he heard my last name, he shuddered. He knew my great uncle Jack was

the president of the Missouri Synod back in the 1970s. He saw Jack as the mean conservative who kicked people out of the synod for teaching that the Bible contained errors and for doubting the many miracles of Jesus. He insisted that Jack was wrong and divisive to push out those who taught that the Biblical accounts can be seen as mythical stories. He argued that, whether you believe in miracles or not, it's irrelevant to the main teaching of the Bible.

So I responded to him, and I said, "What about Jesus' feeding of the crowds of five and four thousand? You don't believe that he actually did that?" He said, "It doesn't matter, because that's not the point of the story." He spoke in a quick and cocksure way, as if he was gracing a young and naïve seminary student with some deep and profound knowledge of the text. He went on, "You see, the point of the story is about everyone sharing what he has. Whether Jesus provided the bread and fish made no difference. What's important is that the people worked together to feed one another. And that is the message of Jesus. That is the gospel. It's about having peace with one another."

I responded to him, "No, that's not the gospel. That's the law. Of course we are supposed to share with one another. But we all fall short. But Jesus is God. This is the point of the account. It's that God our creator has become a man, and he cares for us in every way." The round-collared man just look at me without a word, obviously annoyed that I had contradicted him. So I said my goodbyes and went back to my table where I talked with Leah about what the gospel truly is.

The gospel is not that we all show compassion on one another. The gospel is not that we all share our peace and goodwill. The gospel isn't that we satisfy the hungry. No, the gospel is that God shows compassion. He has given his only Son into death to save us from something much greater than earthly hunger. He saved us from eternal condemnation. He bore our sins in his own body, shedding his blood for us, establishing peace before his Father, which he bestows on all sinners. The gospel is nothing without a God who does wonders, who parts the sea, stills the storm, walks on water, multiplies the bread and fish, was born of the Virgin Mary, died for our sins, and was raised again in his body to give us eternal life. Without these wonders and miracles of God, there is no gospel.

If we focus only on our own acts of sharing, our own abilities to satisfy people, our own self-discipline, and our own compassion while losing sight of the great works of God in Christ by which he made satisfaction for our sins, then we don't know anything about God's compassion. God's compassion works miracles. God's compassion does what our human reason naturally rejects. God's compassion shaped the earth, created light, separated it from the darkness, made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that dwells there. God's compassion has complete control over every element, both visible and invisible. God's compassion made man, both male and female, in his own image. And this same compassion of God led him to the very depths, to claim our flesh as his own, to bear our sin and guilt in his own body, and miraculously to burst forth from the tomb.

Of course God calls us to show compassion on one another. Of course God wants us to discipline our bodies and be willing to go without food and other comforts when necessary. Don't overindulge. Think about your neighbor's hunger before your own cravings. Share what you have with those who are in need. Give without grumbling. Be generous without judging, scrutinizing, and assuming the worst about the one who needs your help and support. Of course God calls us to behave this way. Of course this is what is pleasing to God. Because this is how God himself acts toward us. But God teaches us to be compassionate not so that we would lose sight of our great need for his compassion and care. When we forget about his compassion toward us, then we begin to replace it with our own. This is what that

free-thinking Anglican priest did. He replaced the compassion of God with a pious sounding yet fleeting compassion of man.

Our compassion always falls short. Maybe the crowd of four thousand did share what they had. Or maybe some of them gorged themselves the first day, irresponsibly satisfying their cravings. In either case, they ran out of whatever they had. In either case, they fell short. And after three days they didn't have enough. Regardless of how well meaning, disciplined, or prepared they thought they were when they followed Jesus out into the wilderness, it simply wasn't enough.

But Jesus didn't say anything about how much they had eaten the first or second day. He didn't point out the ones who had been more responsible with their rations and which ones showed little foresight. He simply had compassion on them. On all of them!

Jesus doesn't weigh how responsible you have been with your food and goods before he has compassion on you. After all of our labor, what we have to offer before our Maker amounts to less than a few scraps of bread and fish. But what satisfies us is not how much we have managed to save in our bank accounts or grow in our investments. What truly satisfies us is God's compassion. He was fully satisfied by the bread of Jesus' flesh, which he gave on the cross for the life of the whole world. He was fully satisfied by his own compassion on poor sinners. His righteous anger was turned away from all of the wicked cravings and lusts of our hearts. And he is still moved by compassion to satisfy us with all good things. When we know this compassion, which is deep in the heart of God and delivered to us by the precious gospel of his Son, when we taste this compassion in his body and blood, when we have the confidence that our sins are forgiven and that our bodies will rise again to eternal life, then we can be satisfied. We have enough. We are content. We are at peace with God. And all other things will be added unto us. Let us pray:

I am content! My Jesus liveth still,
In whom my heart is pleased.
He hath fulfilled the Law of God for me,
God's wrath He hath appeased.
Since He in death could perish never,
I also shall not die forever.
I am content! I am content!

It is enough! O Lord, Thou moved by love,
Hath pity shown to me.
Compassion from Thy heav'nly throne above
Came down to set me free.
Thou satisfied the Father's pleasure
To fill my need beyond all measure.
It is enough! It is enough! Amen.